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THE
DUTIES OF MAN,

AS A MEMBER OF CIVIL SOCIETY.

A
SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE

THE ANCIENT AND HONOURABLE SOCIETY

OF

GREGORIANS,

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY MEETING, AT PONTEFRACT,

On WEDNESDAY the 11th of JULY, 1792.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE *Rights of Man*, have of late been freely discussed. His *Duties* as a Member of civil Society, are not of less importance to his own happiness, or the welfare of the Community.--- The following imperfect sketch of them is, with diffidence, submitted to the public, more from regard to the wishes of the respectable Society, before whom it was preached, than from the Author's own convictions of the propriety of the measure. If any of the Sentiments in this Discourse, should appear to militate against the real Rights of Man,

in a state of Society, i. e. against any such Rights as are not inconsistent with good Government, good Order, and good Morals;---the Author protests against this interpretation, as foreign from his Meaning.---As a Friend to the whole human Race, he will ever rejoice in the diffusion of civil and religious Liberty, as the most valuable of earthly blessings, and as the unalienable Rights of Man. Consistently, however, with the character, to which he here asserts his claim, he must ever oppose those principles, which tend to Anarchy and Licentiousness; and ever will inculcate those Duties of Man, which afford the best security for the enjoyment of his Rights, as a Member of a well regulated Society.

BROTHERTON,

July 18, 1792.

S E R M O N, &c.

MATTHEW vii. 12.

THEREFORE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER YE WOULD
THAT MEN SHOULD DO TO YOU, DO YE EVEN SO TO
THEM: FOR THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.

THERE never was delivered a precept more simple and
obvious to the meanest capacity, more comprehensive in
extent, more admirable in itself, or more worthy of the
Fountain of all Wisdom and Goodness, than that which you
have now heard. Well may it be stiled the sum and substance
of all that is written in the Law and the Prophets, respecting
moral Duties, for, it applies to every possible situation in
which we can be placed, and clears up every doubt in those
new and trying circumstances which no general law can reach.
No case, however difficult, can occur, wherein we shall be
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at a loss how to act, if we faithfully consult this moral rule, —nor can we mistake, in the application of it, in any part of our conduct, to our fellow creatures, if we but fairly make their case our own, and appeal to our conscience, “How, in the like circumstances, we should expect or desire to be treated.”

This, like every other precept of the gospel, presupposes the operation of some general principles, of sufficient power and sanction to influence our conduct. Mere directions, without motives to duty, are but a dead letter, and when men act without motives, it must be when they act without reason.—Too often, indeed, we act from the impulse of our animal nature, without regard to any rational motives of conduct, and the distinction between men and brutes is lost in the destructive vortex of passion. Such is the unruly violence of human appetites, unrestrained by religious principles, that “the good which we would, we do not, and the evil which “we would not, that we do.”

But when the sublime motives of christianity have gained an ascendancy in the human mind, and the heart is brought into subjection to the dictates of the understanding, then, we not only see and approve of the things that are excellent, but are led diligently to pursue, and industriously to practise them.—When the Creator of the universe is viewed in his true parental character, as our reconciled Father in Jesus Christ;—when our minds, impressed with a grateful sense of his mercy and goodness,

ness, have imbibed a settled conviction, that he wills nothing so much as our real welfare and happiness, and, consequently, that the sure way to these is the way of his commandments; then, our duty and our interest become so inseparably connected, that it would seem to be a violence to our reason and our feelings, when we knowingly omit, or wilfully transgress, the pure and benevolent precepts of the gospel. When the eye of faith is directed to the great Day of Retribution, in which Jesus Christ will come to judge the world in righteousness,—to give a crown of life to those who have been faithful unto death; and glory, honour, and immortality to those who have fought them by a patient continuance in well-doing; then, notwithstanding the infirmities and defects incident to the best of men, it will be the prevailing object of our minds, to walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long, to offer unto God a reasonable service. Actuated by these principles, animated by these views, our obedience will be uniform, and our respect manifested to all the commandments of our Lord:—whether they be such as are expressive of our homage and dependence on the supreme Being, as our creator and preserver, or of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Saviour and Judge,—whether they regard our self-government, the secret discipline of our hearts and minds, or the exercise of justice, mercy, and charity to our fellow-creatures.

Our text applies to the latter class of duties. I will endeavour to point out the application of it in some few instances, which appear to be of the utmost importance to us, as members

bers of society, and of the most indispensable obligation, as the disciples of Jesus Christ.

This, with many other precepts of the gospel, implies a variety and inequality in the conditions, abilities, and circumstances of mankind. Rulers and subjects, wise and ignorant, rich and poor, have, each, their respective and appropriate duties, all, their reciprocal and mutual obligations. Those duties which result from the relation of rulers and subjects, are of vast importance to our present happiness, and, at this period, cannot be too seriously considered by those, who, attentive to the best interests of mankind, would wish to preserve to themselves and their fellow-citizens the blessings of good order, and of temperate liberty. The spirit of the gospel, in perfect unison with the voice of right reason, is equally averse from tyranny and oppression, as from anarchy and licentiousness. From a dread of the former, however, some persons have indicated a strong propensity to encounter all the horrors of the latter. Because men are equal, considered as partakers of the same nature, modern writers would infer that a political Equality should be preserved among all the members of a state.—However plausible, in theory, this reasoning may appear, if reduced to practice, it would be found inconsistent with the very existence of the state. Equality—and Government—are evidently incompatible with each other—and as no state can exist without government, so neither can government be supported without power,—power sufficient to infuse spirit and energy into the laws, and to maintain due subordination, good order
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and good morals. The attempt to establish a political Equality, in any populous and opulent Country, must be absurd, because in the issue it is impracticable. Nor can the abolition of the artificial distinctions of rank in society ever prevent those actual distinctions in point of power, pre-eminence and influence, which attend on superior wealth, superior wisdom, address, ingenuity and industry. If there be no Aristocrates, there will be Demagogues, whose clashing views and interests will prove the fruitful parent of discord, and will prey on the very vitals of the state.—To argue from man in a state of nature, to man in a state of society, must be fallacious, for there is no analogy between the one and the other from which we can reason. In the former case there is no Government, no restraint on the passions and vices of men; but if protection, and those comforts which a well regulated society affords, be expected, it must be on this equitable condition, that we pay obedience to the Laws, and give support to the Government, by which these blessings are secured to us. In confirmation of the sentiments here advanced, I appeal to the history of past ages, and to the distracted Policy of a neighbouring Kingdom.—Whatever be the issue of those violent convulsions which at present endanger that once flourishing Country, we may learn an useful lesson from the miseries it now experiences. France may teach us, to set a just value on the blessings we enjoy, to beware how we loose the bonds of society by weakening the hands of Government;—France may teach us, to attend *less* to speculative Rights, and *more* to practical Duties. We have not a good Government to seek,—for as to all useful

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purposes we already possess a Constitution, which has been the envy and admiration of the world.—We have only to preserve it.

Far be it from us, to magnify the appearance of danger, or unnecessarily to excite alarms in this Country;—yet, if ever there was a period when Government required the most firm and united support of its Friends, this surely is the time:—When a number of persons are not merely clamorous for reform, but openly avow their Hostility to the present established order of things;—when they publicly league with foreign Clubs for the express purpose of overturning the Constitution; when Publications are industriously disseminated among the lower orders of the people, tending to excite a spirit of discontent and disaffection, to prejudice them against the well regulated Government of a limited Monarchy, and to instil into their minds vague and ill-digested notions of Democracy;—notions, teeming with Anarchy and Confusion, and fraught with the destruction of all order, and all the comforts of this happy Country.—These attempts we trust, will be fruitless. The good sense of the people can never entertain the disposition to exchange the lenient Sway of our present Rulers, for the lawless Tyranny of a Mob, or, on the Ruins of Liberty, to erect a Temple to Licentiousness.

Let us, however, remember, that it is easier to prevent than to remedy Evils. Let us consider, what we, at this crisis, should expect, were we oppressed with the anxious cares of
Government.

Government. Should we not look anxiously to the people for support—should we not earnestly desire, that every well-disposed person would by his authority, his influence and example, promote in his family, amongst his labourers, dependents, and neighbours, submission to the Laws, and respect for their Governors,—that they might love the Brotherhood, fear God, and honour the King?—Let us then act consistently with the principle of our text, and so conduct ourselves with respect to our Rulers, as we should expect and desire, were we in their situation and circumstances.

In advancing these sentiments, let me not be understood as contending against the real Rights of Man in a state of society. No,—there are Rights which will not be denied by any thinking person, and of which no man can be deprived without manifest injustice. Such is the right to protection in person and property:—such are the sacred rights of conscience, which no human law can reach, and therefore no human power should attempt to control:—such is the right to just and equitable Laws, operating on all ranks and descriptions of Citizens, without partial privileges or exceptions. How far these social Rights have been enjoyed in this Country, you have not now to learn. Let us remember, that they can only be preserved by the performance of social Duties. Good morals are the strongest bond of human society, and are of universal obligation. And while we contend that Rulers are bound to study and promote the happiness of the people, we assert, that respect, obedience, and support, are in return, due to our Rulers.—

These Duties are linked together in the moral chain. By attention to them, Society is upheld, and the component parts cemented:—by the violation of them, on either side, the whole Body must ever receive the deepest injury. But, were our text ingrafted in the hearts of men, and made the rule and standard of their actions, the happiest effects must necessarily be produced. Then, the sacred trust of power would never be abused to the purposes of Tyranny, nor the invaluable blessings of Liberty perverted to the disorders of Licentiousness:—Law would not be made the instrument of Oppression, nor would Faction or Interest attempt to defeat the regular operation of it;—wholesome and salutary Laws would be enacted,—cheerful Conformity and Submission would be paid to them. In short, all the members of the political Body would be intimately united with their common head, and good order, good morals, peace, harmony, and prosperity would pervade the whole System.

As Perfection is not within the reach of man, as an individual, it is not indeed to be expected in his collective capacity. Yet, though we as Citizens cannot hope to arrive at perfection, we should not relax in our endeavours to approach to it. In this laudable, this glorious Work, let us sedulously cultivate religious principle in our minds, and recommend it to others by our actions. *This* is the only steady principle of human conduct. The man who is devoid of it will be unstable in all his ways, driven about by every wind of caprice, by every impulse of passion; whilst He, who acts upon this solid

solid foundation, will uniformly persevere in a course of Piety to God, of Justice, Mercy, and Charity to Man. He will love God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and will love his Neighbour as himself,—i.e. “ He will do unto “ all men as he would they should do unto him.”—Here it is, that in this Country, Reformation is most wanted.—Let this be accomplished, and we may be assured, that such political Reforms as are really wanted, will follow of course. No good Man will oppose *real Improvement* in the State, however averse he may feel from *dangerous Experiments* on it's Constitution. No wise Man would slight the prescription of the skilful and experienced Physician, however determined to resist the application of desperate remedies, proposed by pretending Empyrics, founded on untried theories, and prompted by a spirit of bold and hazardous speculation.

I shall briefly advert to some few leading Duties, incumbent on us, as *fellow Citizens*, and which greatly contribute to the happiness and welfare of Society.—Truth in our speech, and sincerity in our professions, are undoubtedly of this description. We are forbidden to bear false testimony—and are commanded to put away lying, and that every Man should speak truth with his Neighbour. No person will deny, that in his own case, it is painful to be imposed upon, by the communications of falsehoods, or to be deceived by professions of friendship.—His own character as a Man of veracity may thereby be brought into question, or, he may suffer the bitter pangs of disappointment.

pointment. Let no Man therefore do to another, what he cannot but consider and feel as an injury, when done to himself.

We mean not harshly to condemn those expressions of civility, which custom has established in our occasional intercourse with each other, as no person is deceived by them, as they are not used with an intention to deceive;—and though sometimes carried to an excess, it is the excess of a quality, amiable in itself, of civility, and a desire to please,—a quality that contributes, not a little, to the innocent enjoyments of social life, of which, true Religion breathes not a wish to deprive us.—We shall do well, however, even here, to guard against excess, and in the ordinary commerce of life, to cultivate a strict regard to accuracy, in our accounts of transactions and persons, and to preserve truth and sincerity in our testimony and professions. In so doing, we shall strengthen the Bonds of human Confidence, and largely contribute to the Security and Happiness of Mankind.

Another Duty, of great consequence in Society, is *Justice*. It is an acknowledged principle of Christianity, that no Man go beyond or defraud his Brother in any matter,—that no Man take advantage of the ignorance—the weakness—the necessities of another, but that he should render to every one his Due.—There is not a precept of practical Religion, that requires to be more frequently, or more earnestly inculcated than this, as there is no Duty more frequently violated.—How common it
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is, in the ordinary concerns and dealings of Men, to take every advantage, to employ every art, to compass a sinister purpose. Honesty and Integrity yield to the superior power of interest, and the love of Money tramples on the sacred principle of Justice.—Did but Christianity maintain it's influence over us, this conduct could not be so frequent. We should consider, not only what would be profitable, but what is lawful,—not only what is expedient in point of advantage, but what is justifiable in a moral view. When tempted by the prospect of gain to do an unjust act, our minds would readily suggest to us this question, “How can I do this Wickedness, and sin “against God?”—“How should I, in similar Circumstances, “approve of being thus treated?”—and this inquiry will, to a mind influenced by the Doctrines of the Gospel, lead to this determined conclusion,—“I will do unto all Men what, in “this, and in all other cases, I would they should do unto “me.”

Lastly, with respect to Mercy and Charity,—described by the sacred writers as the end of the Commandment, the fulfilling of the Law, the bond of perfectness, and of all virtues,—and declared by our Lord, to be the distinguishing Test of true Christianity.—’Tis Charity that softens the hardships, and alleviates the miseries, inseparable from human life. The time would fail me, were I to attempt to illustrate the various ways, in which the benevolent affection will express itself;—in forming and declaring our opinion of our Neighbour, in our differences with him, in our forbearance under injuries,
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and provocations from him, and in our exertions to promote his welfare. This last expression of our love, however, comes so immediately within the truly laudable design of this ancient and respectable Society, that, not to urge some few Considerations in favour of it, would be an unpardonable omission.

If we contemplate the Nature of Man, with his various wants and weaknesses, we cannot but acknowledge the great advantages that must result from the mutual exercise of Love and Charity. The individual exists not, who can properly be said to be, independent of his fellow Creatures. Be his situation ever so exalted, his circumstances ever so affluent, he must be beholden to the Ingenuity and Industry of the lower orders of Mankind, for nearly all the Comforts, Conveniences and Necessaries of Life. “The Eye cannot say to the Hand, “I have no need of thee, nor again, the Head to the Feet, I “have no need of you.” On the contrary,—“there should “be no schism in the body, but all the members should have “the same care one for another.”—Whilst the poor, by their labour, minister to the ease and comforts of the rich;—the opulent by their affability, tenderness, humanity, and charity, should alleviate the hardships, and relieve the wants of the poor and miserable. We are bound to adopt this conduct, not more by the ties of Nature and Society, than by the dictates of sound Policy. The superiority of rank and wealth is, in these days, regarded with invidious eyes. To diminish, by repeated acts of kindness and beneficence, the apparent distance between those of high and of low degree, is the most effectual

effectual mode to make the lower orders of the people contented and happy in their respective situations. The bulk of mankind are not to be convinced by Reasoning, that the unequal distribution of property is unavoidable, and that difference in degrees, and progressive subordination are, on the whole, productive of the greatest good, in a civilized state;—but they may be brought, to feel a sense of gratitude and reverence for their protectors and benefactors,—to respect the power, that defends them from injury, and to love the benevolence that relieves their wants.

But the strongest bond of human Charity is formed from that most intimate relation, which, as Christians, we bear to each other;—as the reconciled Children of one common Father,—as the united Brethren of one common Lord and Saviour,—as partakers of the same spirit,—animated with the same glorious views, and bound by the same pure and beneficent laws. How forcible was the expostulation of the Jewish Legislator to his Countrymen!—“Sirs, ye are Brethren, why do ye wrong one to another?”—But how much more forcibly does it apply to the Brethren and followers of Jesus Christ?—He hath taught us, both by his Precepts and Example, not only, *not* to do wrong, but to do good to our Brethren, nay, even to return Good for Evil.—*He* hath taught us, that it is not enough, that we are not extortioners, unjust, adulterers, if, at the same time, we possess not the Graces, and perform not the active Duties of Christianity.—*He* hath taught us, that it

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is not enough that we have not wasted our Lord's Talent, if we have not diligently improved, and faithfully applied it.—Christian Virtue consists not in a mere freedom from vice, but delights also in positive acts of goodness.—“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”—We are commanded to “bear one another's burthens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ.”—His law is not fulfilled in the most orthodox Confessions of Faith,—the most impetuous zeal of the flighty Enthusiast, or the most rapturous emotions of the fanciful Mystic;—but then only, when the like mind that was in Jesus Christ, is also in us, and is exemplified in the like conduct. The only infallible evidence of a Christian Faith, is a Christian Life.—And, the same principles that lead us to walk humbly with our God, will stimulate us to do justly, and shew mercy to our Brethren. The same motives that prompt us to adopt suitable methods of expressing our faith and dependence, our love and gratitude to God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, will also induce us to seize every proper occasion of manifesting our Mercy and Charity to our fellow Creatures. Have they injured us,—we should forgive them, as we hope or desire to be forgiven: are they ignorant,—we should instruct them: are they distressed,—we should comfort them: are they sinking under the weight of poverty,—we should extend the helping hand of Charity to them:—in a word, “We should on all occasions, so do unto them, as we would, in similar circumstances, they should do unto us.”

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These, my Brethren, are the sentiments which, on the present occasion, I thought incumbent on me, with plainness and sincerity to deliver.—To your candour I commit them:—to your attentive consideration, I beg leave to recommend them. As *Subjects*, to manifest respect to our Rulers, and reverence to the Laws,—to cultivate in ourselves, and promote in others, a strict attention to good order, and good morals:—As *Fellow Citizens*, to preserve truth and sincerity in our speech and professions,—to keep inviolate the principles of justice, and integrity, in our mutual commerce,—and to perform cheerfully, and habitually, all the offices of Mercy and Charity:—These are Duties which appear, to me, to accord with the genuine spirit and tendency of the Gospel,—most likely to promote the happiness of individuals, and to serve the best interests of the Community.—Let us then, as Subjects, as Citizens, and as Christians,—for our own sakes,—for the sake of our Country,—for the glory of our Divine Master, and the credit of his Religion, endeavour so to conduct ourselves, in all the relations and circumstances of life, as becometh the professing disciples and followers of Jesus Christ. Let us, by our advice, our influence, and example, promote the Reformation most wanted,—a religious, and moral Reformation, in the principles and manners of Men.—And in addition to the many powerful motives which the Gospel holds forth to us, let us ever bear in mind, that we then exhibit the most unequivocal proof of our fidelity to God, and most effectually recommend our Religion to men, when to our Faith, we add, Virtue:—When
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to our love for God, we add Benevolence to our Neighbour:—
or, in other words, when in all our dealings and intercourse
with Mankind, we adhere to the invaluable Rule of our Text,
and “do unto others, what in similar Cases and Circumstances.
should do unto us.”

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